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The Prophet's Paradise

Howard Hall



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THE

PROPHET'S PARADISE



The Prophet's Paradise

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HOWARD HALL.

" Some for the glories of this world—and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come."

—*Omar Khayyam.*

New York and Washington
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY
M C M I V

TPC 2516

TPC 2516

1904

Jan. 15, 1904
77-151

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THE PROPHET'S PARADISE.

I.

To-night I stand upon the Mount of Hope,
While darkness veils the scene above, below,
And thro' this veil of mystery I grope,
The riddle of my life to see—to know.

II.

Behold! a traveler, bent and seared with age,
Calls loudly—"I have found the Only Way!
'Tis here revealed upon this sacred page
Believe, and ye shall see the Light of Day."

III.

A million voices answer—"We believe!"
A million voices cry—"We see the Light!"
A million more the Light cannot perceive,
And still with me are groping in the Night.

IV.

Doubt's shadows fell across the Vale of Youth
When o'er the Book I pored, and not one leaf
Revealed to me—though eager for the truth—
The evidence that must precede belief.

V.

“Ye must believe, or perish!” What, I must?
 You tell me this is day, and yet ’tis night?
I must believe ’tis day, or else be thrust
 Into Hell’s torments?—Oh, the sorry plight!

VI.

Here’s everlasting joy, if I believe;
 There’s everlasting pain, if I deny.
And will not God then send some kind reprieve?
 Or must the souls who doubt forever die?

VII.

Why, if He made my soul, who made the doubt?
 I vainly strive to think that black is white.
Meant He that some should ever stand without,
 While others bask within His glorious light?

VIII.

Lo! Simon seeks to buy with ready cash
 The Gift of Grace, and ’scape the chast’ning rod.
And is enforced belief a whip to lash
 The sons of men into the Church of God?

IX.

“Ye must believe!”—Oh, give me proofs; for lo!
No power of will can my belief compel;
And, if it suits my selfish wish, or no,
I’ll straight believe your scheme of Heaven and Hell.

* * * * *

X.

“I am the Light and Way.”—What, did He mean
That in His name alone could Heaven be found?
Or was it that the lowly Nazarene
But used an “I” a metaphor to sound?

XI.

That what was true of Him is true of all?
That each within himself must find the Way?
The scales from off thy inner sight let fall,
And learn to know thyself, O man of clay!

XII.

“He meaneth this; he meaneth that.”—Oh, say,
Who is so wise to tell, when none concur;
Who teacheth right, who wrong?—Oh, tell me, pray,
Who is the only true interpreter?

XIII.

Oneself? And, were it so, my point of view
Might haply serve some portion to reveal
Of the great scheme of things denied to you;
And yours, some grain of truth for earthly weal.

XIV.

And, were it given to one to see the Whole,
And he should tell his neighbors all about
The secret of his own immortal soul,
Without the evidence they still must doubt.

XV.

And who is there who claims, with spirit-eyes,
The Heavenly spectacle to have beheld?
Who e'er could ope' the gates of Paradise
To those whom Fate to grope in doubt compelled?

XVI.

“There is a destiny that shapes our ends.”
“Fate guides our barque across the sea of life.”
If this be true, how foolish then, my friends,
To waste a moment in the toil and strife?

XVII.

But who is Fate? Is she omnipotent,
That she can sway the lives of men whom God,
Without their knowledge, and without consent,
Hath planted here upon this earthly sod?

XVIII.

Or, is Fate but a word coined to express
Some hidden force in Nature that controls
The acts of men? And so we guess and guess;
But cannot guess the destiny of souls.

XIX.

“Your Holy Book,” I hear a voice protest,
“Is but the effort of weak, finite man
To clothe Infinity;” and some are blest
With special visions to reveal the Plan.

XX.

And we—the seekers for the truth—are called
The pattern of each Prophet to behold;
And choose we one, the others stand appalled,
Consigning all to Hell outside their fold.

XXI.

Ah, tireless traveler in search of Truth,
If one alone besought thee to rejoice
'Twere eas'ly done. A wrangling host, in sooth,
Besets thee, and 'tis hard to make a choice.

XXII.

It cannot be that all of them are right;
It may not be that all of them are wrong;
But which one is the True and Only Light
Must ever be the burden of our song.

XXIII.

So must this song of Hope and Doubt be sung,
Till Truth appears upon this barren fen,
Disrobed of every rag that man hath flung
About her form to cheat his fellow men.

* * * * *

XXIV.

In this confusion of beliefs I turn
Aback upon my inner consciousness,
Despairing the elusive truth to learn,
The riddle-revelation e'er to guess.

XXV.

And ask of self—"Is there within a soul
That hopes to find a sphere of usefulness
Beyond the Gates of Mystery?—a goal
Where high achievement's crowned with happiness?"

XXVI.

The voice of Reason answers—"There may be."
Since Nature hath revealed to mortal eyes
A perfect system of economy
Of force and matter, may we not surmise

XXVII.

That somewhere in the boundless universe
A sphere of usefulness awaits the soul?
If not, then Hope itself's a damned curse—
A false dawn breaking on a wreck-strewn shoal.

XXVIII.

Behold! man thirsts, and Nature gives him drink;
He hungers, and she bounteously provides;
He loves, and finds this side the River's brink
The Heaven, or Hell, he seeks beyond its tides.

XXIX.

For every craving of the human heart
In Nature's store-house man may find supply;
And, by this token, to some future mart
He dares to lift a hopeful, longing eye.

XXX.

He strives with eager eyes to read above,
'Mid stars, the soul's transcendent history.
Why may not Hope—so universal—prove
The clue he seeks unto the mystery?

XXXI.

For, if eternal silence be our lot,
Whence comes this longing after future life?
Did God concoct so hideous a plot—
With false hopes tempt us to endure the strife?

XXXII.

Hope's not the mere creation of mankind.
Mankind createth nothing. For, behold!
Thought is an element that, through the mind,
Seeks e'er to give itself new form and mould.

XXXIII.

The marble block, from which yon goddess came
To grace the world, remains a senseless stone.
The sculptor has achieved undying fame,
And claims the fair creation as his own.

XXXIV.

How vain! For he, himself, existence owes
To the same Source from which the marble came,
And from that Source his inspiration flows.
“A faithful servant”—He no more can claim.

XXXV.

Hope's not the mere creation of mankind.
The wise of earth and savage tribes unite
In hope that they some after life may find.
Ah, may not Hope then prove the Only Light?

XXXVI.

The only light vouchsafed us from afar
To guide our footsteps through the tangled way?
Across the Stream of Death, the only star
That in the night of doubt gives forth a ray?

XXXVII.

Sweet Hope, our solace in this Vale of Tears!
God's hand inscribed thee on the hearts of men.
Thy light dispels Annihilation's fears;
Thy voice alone bids man to live again.

XXXVIII.

Sufficeth not, my friends, the ray of Hope
That finds response in every human breast?
For further revelation cease to grope;
You've found the Light that 'luminates the rest.

XXXIX.

The Central Flame from which all light is drawn
To 'luminate each Prophet's dark design.
Man's love of life, as now, in ages gone,
Made him unto the first belief incline.

XL.

He hoped for everlasting life, and hence
Grasped the first promise with an eager hand.
For what paid he so freely of his pence?—
A prophet's passport to a promised land.

XLI.

Upon this fundamental truth is based
The edifice of every faith and creed;
This is the revelation God hath traced,
And all the revelation that we need.

XLII.

We need no threats of Hell our souls to move,
The soul aspires above earth's lowly sod.
We need no musty manuscripts to prove
That human hearts reflect the grace of God.

XLIII.

No Book of Revelation to believe
For all that is there must exist a Cause,
Some great Intelligence this web to weave.
We grant the Giver when we grant His laws.

XLIV.

Then let us face this stern reality:
The universal dread of coming death,
The longing after immortality,
Unto Religion gave the first life breath--

XLV.

Religion that endures alone through Hope,
Despite the superstitions that have grown
Out of the ignorance through which we grope
To blindly worship at some Fetich throne.

XLVI.

Have done with creed and dogma! They can teach
Thee nothing of the soul's celestial way;
For preachers cannot practice what they preach,
And yesterday's saved souls backslide to-day.

XLVII.

Well I remember seeing many kneel
Before an altar where their shepherd raved,
And marveled that he seemed to know and feel
Each poor, repentant sinner would stay saved.

XLVIII.

Yet some I've seen who wandered from his fold;
And that Interpreter of Sacred Lore
Their swift damnation instantly foretold
When they approached another shepherd's door.

XLIX.

Who gave him power to save, or damn, a soul?

That power is God's. As seaward flows the brook,
So man at last shall reach his heavenly goal
Without the aid of Prophet, Priest, or Book.

* * * * *

L.

When Omar sought the mystery to tell,

And, on the wings of Hope, sent forth his soul
“Some letter of that after-life to spell,”
He turned too often to the flowing bowl.

LI.

For wine and wisdom Omar sought the glass,

And, oh, the solace that its contents gave!
‘T will cheer thy heart to-day; how—when the grass
To-morrow shall be growing o'er thy grave?

LII.

“Ah, take the cash and let the credit go,

Nor heed the rumble of a distant drum.”

*He knew men feared “the dark Ferash,” and so
They sought “the Prophet's paradise to come.”*

LIII.

“A single Alif were the clue.” Alas!

That one so near the vital truth should grope;
And yet half-guessed this Prophet of the glass
The clue unto the Master’s house was—Hope.

* * * * *

LIV.

In many climes are many souls whose zeal
Inspires them to such absurd excess
As faith in prayer their mortal ills to heal,
Abjuring cures God meant for man’s distress.

LV.

If God intended not that man should use
His remedies, why did He place them here,
When Faith could cure all ills? It seems obtuse;
Perhaps the Holy Book will make it clear.

LVI.

“Is any sick among you, let him call
The Elders of the Church and let them pray.
The prayer of Faith shall save the sick.”—For all
Who’d follow Christ consistently, I say—

LVII.

You must all earthly remedies abjure;
Dismiss your man of medicine at once;
If cancer eats your flesh, apply no cure,
For he who bows to Science is a dunce.

LVIII.

What though Creation's God hath placed within
Your easy reach a cure for every ill?
If you dare use it you commit a sin.
Your Lord will heal you, if it be His will,

LIX.

And if you die, why, you can die but once.
And here, again, I feel constrained to say
That he who bows to Science is a dunce,
Unless it be a fallacy to pray.

LX.

Man's brain and body such relations hold
As master over slave. So intimate
Is this relation that the mind may mould
The mortal frame, diseased, to health's estate.

LXI.

The human brain, afflicted with disease,
Or which some ill exaggerates, may yield
To the suggestion that its pain shall cease—
Strong minds o'er weak ones may this power wield.

LXII.

Each Prophet boasts the secret all his own,
And Christian Science claims to hold the key;
But Buddhist and Mohammedan have shown
Rare knowledge of the faith-cure mystery.

LXIII.

When Priests of Allah, in far-distant lands,
Above the sick and lame their God conjure,
Healing with prayer and laying on of hands,
What is it then that works the wonder cure?

LXIV.

"Tis concentration of the human mind.
Whether in prayer, or some occult plan,
A seed of thought is sown, and ye shall find
It is not prayer, but thought that saves the man.

LXV.

A little courage to resist Death's bonds
A kindly word of cheer may serve to give.
What is it to thy prayer of faith responds?—
The Hope within our hearts that bids us live

LXVI.

It is a law. The miracles were wrought
By this same law, till Wisdom's might untied
The knot of ignorance, and man was taught
This law, for good or ill, might be applied.

LXVII.

This law, the base of truth, on which doth rest
All forms of healing in a guise divine,
Is Fact disrobed of raiment. Men, in quest
Of this law's Giver, to their gods incline.

LXVIII.

The Buddhist to his earth-god, lo! doth yearn;
Unto Mohammed still another cries;
The Christian to the Nazarene doth turn,
And, in His name, this law of Nature plies.

LXIX.

One scoffs to scorn the other's God and Creed,
There is but One—it matters not His name;
His Book, the Book of Nature, all may read,
And, reading, learn the secret of life's game.

LXX.

To give expression to his inner grace,
Man sought for God in some material form;
And down through ages dark his gods we trace
And find not one that could withstand the storm.

LXXI.

The storm that sweeps the spirit o'er the Styx.
Of common clay, they fell before the wind;
In life, they cheated men with juggler's tricks,
And left no trace of Deity behind.

LXXII.

The angler's hooks have countless shapes, forsooth,
With which they fish for souls within life's brook.
I've nibbled at them all, and found, in truth,
The tempting bait of Hope on every hook.

LXXIII.

Would you a Prophet be? Oh, then, take heed
That without Hope no faith can long endure.
Go, shape your Creed; but if you would succeed,
Man's hope of immortality assure.

* * * * *

LXXIV.

A friendly spirit comes from some lone star
And whispers in my listening ear to-night;
And this the message brought me from afar:
“Seek not in Holy Writ for Truth and Light.”

LXXV.

Cease, man, to fix thy gaze upon the Book—
An atom in the Mighty Maker's plan!
Think ye thy little stream the only brook
To reach the boundless sea since Time began?

LXXVI.

Behold the River Styx! whose thither bank
Is screened forever from our mortal gaze.
What of those souls who braved its waves and sank
Before the era of Christ's mystic maze?

LXXVII.

What of those millions who have gone before
Who never saw thy light of holy ray?
What of the millions now upon this shore
Who worship God, but not a god of clay?

LXXVIII.

What of the millions who, in foreign lands,
Unto great Allah pour their songs of praise?
What of the millions more who lift their hands
In worship to the Sun-God's matchless rays?

LXXIX.

And unborn millions that shall come to swell
The hosts who failed thy riddle-book to read—
Must all of these go down to hopeless Hell
With those who doubt thy man-made God and Creed?

LXXX.

Again the still, small voice bids me proclaim:
“The soul—immortal as the drop of dew—
Shall rise above the mire of sin and shame,
As pure and radiant as the rainbow's hue.

LXXXI.

“Each moment brings man nearer to the goal;
The lamp of progress lights the upward way;
The aspiring mind reflects the growing soul
That blossoms ’neath Achievement’s smiling ray.

LXXXII.

“His tireless soul shall ever upward bend,
Surmounting every barrier that bars.
When every knowledge in earth’s keep is kenned
His eye shall pierce the mystery of stars.

LXXXIII.

“Then readers of the Book, both old and new,
Shall fear no more the Church’s chastening-rods.
The Christian, then, the Gentile and the Jew,
Shall cease to bend the knee to Fetich gods.

LXXXIV.

“Then Buddhist and Mohammedan shall come
To join the Christian and the Infidel
In search of Truth. And this the final sum:
One God for all, one Heaven, and no Hell.”

* * * * *

LXXXV.

Oh, sorry pilgrim, puzzled by the ghosts
Of this and that belief, with me rejoice!
Leave Creed and Dogma to the bickering hosts,
And hark the message of the “still, small voice.”

LXXXVI.

Hark to the “still, small voice” that ever seeks
To breathe new words of truth into thine ear!
Wait! Listen! For it is thy Maker speaks—
The sinner and the saint alike may hear.

LXXXVII.

Upon the tablets of the human brain
The Invisible Stylus writes; God then
Commands enactment. Lo! The fact is plain,
On waves of thought He sends His Truth to men.

LXXXVIII.

Thou canst not err if thou but use thy wits,
Thy safest guide by day, thy lamp by night.
Give ear to every thought. Thy conscience sits,
A wary censor, to discern the right.

LXXXIX.

What vaileth him who to delusion clings?
How profit they who shut their eyes to sin?
Be thou the man that wide the portal flings
And bids the light of Wisdom enter in.

XC.

Apply unto thyself with diligence
The searching light of Truth, and never halt
Till from thy nature every vile offense
Is driven forth, and vanished every fault.

XCI.

With earnest zeal tread thou the Wisdom-way;
Solve every riddle, and each tangle trace;
Make this thy creed, and, if thou needs must pray,
Seek thou of Nature's God a throne of grace.

XCI.

So live that thou canst proudly say—"The world
Is better for my having lived." Nor sigh
Because thy name may never be unfurled
On scroll of fame to fill the envious eye.

XCHII.

Seek not the world's applause—'tis empty sound.
Fill well thy purse; in this be thou a Jew.
If true unto thy nature, thou art bound
To do the thing that Wisdom bids thee do.

XCIV.

So live that, when the last event shall come,
And thou must face the dark and mystic stream,
Thou canst recall the spot thou journeyed from,
Rejoicing thou hast won thine own esteem.

XCV.

The spot from whence thou journeyed—oh, how far!
Yet infinitely farther seems the goal.
Forever up life's rugged peaks the star
Of Hope allures the all aspiring soul.

XCVI.

Although not far along the chosen road,
And with regretful sigh thou dost recall
The failures that across thy pathway strode,
Let not with grim despair thy spirit fall,

XCVII.

For truer proverb ne'er was penned than this:
“The darkest hour is just before the dawn”—
The Spirit of the Morn, with soothing kiss,
Speeds to thy spirit fleetly as a fawn.

XCVIII.

And so we stand upon the Mount of Hope,
Death’s mystery still veiled from mortal eye,
And striving to discern that distant slope
To reach whose shores we yearn—yet dread to die.

XCIX.

Oh! love of life and dread of death, ye are
The parents of this vital spirit, Hope,
Who ever beckons to us from afar,
And bids us cease through vales of doubt to grope.

C.

Sweet Hope, our solace in this Vale of Tears!
God’s hand inscribed thee on the hearts of men;
Thy light dispels Annihilation’s fears,
Thy voice alone bids man to live again.

CI.

Faith, Hope, and Charity are Graces three.
Not many practice, tho' they preach the creed,
That "the greatest of these is Charity."
If true—ye shepherds of the Lord, take heed!

CII.

Call not thy brother fool, or hypocrite,
Because he wanders from this Point of Truth
In a direction far and opposite
To that toward which you blindly grope, forsooth;

CIII.

Nor relegate, with arrogance supreme,
Thy brother to damnation who may chance
To worship some Divinity whose scheme
Accords not with thy vision's broad expanse.

CIV.

For all are right, since all, with hopeful eyes,
Through darkling clouds look up from this low vale
To seek the Light that gleams from Paradise,—
Dim—indistinct—across Death's sombre swale.

CV.

And now my task is o'er. If clearer light
Has swept the shadows from thy tangled way,
The "still, small voice" that bade the servant write
Deserves full credit for this humble lay.

CVI.

The "still, small voice" doth every riddle ree.
Do thou with it in solitude confer;
For of this message be assured that he
Who writes is but the faithful chronicler.

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